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1964 overthrow of Guiana leftists blamed on union bankrolled by CIA

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The London Sunday Times

LONDON — In the House of Commons yesterday, prime minister Harold Wilson faced a more than usually leading question from a Labour Party member who asked:

"Will the prime minister make a statement on his policy toward efforts which are being made by the United States Central Intelligence Agency and other United States intelligence organizations to infiltrate and influence organizations which function in British-administered territories for purposes of subversion of law and order?"

Although Newens didn't say so, Wilson knew he referred at least in part to reports of events in Guyana before the former colony, then known as British Guiana, became self-governing.

Sidestepping the question, Wilson said the British government had no responsibility. He stated that he was not responsible for events before October 1964.

"I know of no activities of this kind in British administrative territories," he said.

Although Newens himself appeared to know nothing of the details, he was hinting at a substantial case.

This is the downfall of the left-wing Cheddi Jagan government in the colony of British Guiana (now independent Guyana) in 1964. Inquiries by the London Sunday Times last week made it clear that this was engineered largely by the CIA.

The only cause for a certain amount of parliamentary unease would seem to be that this government happened to be in a British colony. And the cover which the CIA used was a London-based international trade-union secretariat, the Public Services International (PSI).

Never a Really Happy Colony

As coups go, it was not expensive: Over five years the CIA paid out something over \$700,000. For the colony, British Guiana, the result was about 170 dead, untold hundreds wounded, roughly \$28 million in damage to the economy and a legacy of racial bitterness.

British Guiana, perched on the north-east corner of South America, was never one of Britain's happiest colonies.

In 1953, the first government was elected under an Indian leader, Cheddi

Jagan. He and his wife, Janet, did seem a trifle left-wing, but the Colonial Office reasoned — correctly — that he had won not because of his politics but because of his race.

Race has always split the country: 300,000 Indians scattered mainly through the rural areas, 200,000 Africans clustering mainly in the towns and about 100,000 people of various origins.

The Indians voted fairly solidly for the ascetic left-wing Jagan. The Africans voted equally solidly for Forbes Burnham, an African lawyer well to the right.

To Britain's intense surprise, Jagan meant his left-wing words. He moved against the foreign sugar companies — he lasted three months. Then the British government moved in to quell the uproar, flung out Jagan and stayed until 1957. Jagan, saying exactly the same things, won the 1957 elections, too.

It began to dawn on everybody — most forcibly upon the Americans looking somewhat apprehensively southward — that only an upheaval would ever unseat him.

With 40,000 members cutting across all races and parties, the Local Trade Union Congress was an admirable ready-made opposition. Fortunately, the two dominating unions were already somewhat anti-Jagan. The Sugar Workers' Union had been dealing with the plantation owners quite successfully without interference from Jagan — and, anyway, though racially mixed, the union supported Forbes Burnham's African Party.

The other power base, the Civil Servants' Union, was anti-Jagan primarily because few of its members were Indians. All that was needed was organization.

PSI Had Low Finances

The Public Services International had been in contact with the Guyana Civil Service Union since the early 1950s. It was one of the weaker and less prestigious of the various international networks which exist to export the

union know-how of advanced industrial countries to less developed societies.

By 1958 its finances were low, and its stocks were low with its own parent body, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. It needed a success of some kind.

The financial crisis was resolved, quite suddenly, by the PSI's main American affiliate union, the Federation of State, County and Municipal employees. Its boss, Dr. Arnold Zander had, he told the PSI executives, "been shopping," and had found a donor.

The spoils were modest at first — only several thousand dollars in 1958. It was, the kind donor had said, for Latin America. The money went toward a PSI "recruiting drive" in the northern countries of Latin America by one William J. Doherty Jr., a man with some previous acquaintance of the CIA.

The donor was presumably pleased, because next year, 1959, Zander was able to tell the PSI that his union was opening a full-time Latin-American section on the PSI's behalf. The PSI's representative, said Zander, would be Howard McCabe. McCabe, a stocky, bullet-headed American, appeared to have no previous union history, but the PSI liked him. When he came to its meetings, he distributed cigarette lighters and photographs of himself doling out food parcels to peasants. The lighters and the parcels were both inscribed, "With the compliments of the PSI."

Nobody Asked Where It Came From

The full ludicrousness of this situation appears not to have dawned on the PSI. Zander's union had about 210,000 members at that time, and a monthly income of about \$1,680 — barely enough to cover its own expenses. Yet everyone in the PSI knew that the Latin-American opera-